

1. Introduction

The City of Belmont receives numerous requests from residents for solutions to traffic issues. These often consist of requests to install stop signs at intersections to slow traffic. Most of these requests are processed through the City's Traffic Safety Committee, which is made up of staff from the Belmont Police Department, South County Fire Department and the Belmont Public Works Department. The Traffic Safety Committee is responsible for issues of traffic safety, and primarily uses standard traffic control rules and regulations to determine what traffic controls can be implemented. Among these regulations are the requirements that standard warrants be met for installation of stop signs and other traffic control measures. Normally stop signs do not meet warrants when the main issue is speed control. This has led to some frustration among Belmont residents, and a call for other solutions to traffic speeding issues.

The Traffic Calming Task Force

On December 14, 1999, the Belmont City Council directed the Public Works Department to form a Task Force to examine traffic calming to address the traffic speeding issue in the neighborhoods throughout Belmont. Council also gave a specific direction to the Task Force to focus on Hastings Drive and Chula Vista Drive because of the volumes of cut-through traffic on those streets. In January the Public Works Department put out a call for members for the Task Force, with a target to have representatives from each neighborhood of the City. Press releases were placed in local newspapers and Neighborhood Associations were contacted.

Responses were received from 23 people. Staff determined that all respondents should be on the Task Force to assure an adequate involvement in the meetings. The City Manager requested that members of the Parks and Recreation Committee and the Finance Committee be members of the Task Force. Bicycle, pedestrian and school safety advocacy groups were also contacted, and a bicycle advocate resident of Belmont was a Task Force member. Staff from the Belmont Public Works Department, the Belmont Police Department, the Belmont-Redwood Shores School District and the South County Fire Department were Task Force members, and advised the Task Force regarding the concerns of each department.

The first Task Force meeting was held on March 9, 2000 with 22 members in attendance. There have been a total of 7 meetings where the content of this program was discussed and workshops to explore application of traffic calming to Hastings Drive and Chula Vista Drive. The final two meetings on June 15, 2000 and June 29, 2000 focused on finalizing the Final Draft Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program to be ready for Planning Commission review on July 18, 2000 and City Council approval on July 25, 2000.

The Process of Developing the Program

The Institute of Traffic Engineers (ITE) has provided valuable guidance throughout this process. Their website (<http://www.ite.org/traffic/index.html>) provided links to extensive valuable material and a PowerPoint slide show explaining what Traffic Calming is all about. The Federal Highway Administration, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Transportation Association of Canada and the California League of Cities also have developed materials which were useful in preparing this guide. Many other Cities have developed Neighborhood Traffic Calming Programs. Copies of several of those programs were provided by these Cities and have been used as the basis for this program. Guidelines and checklists from these materials were used to understand and determine the elements desired in the program for Belmont.

The initial Task Force meetings developed an understanding of what traffic calming is all about, and what each traffic calming measure can accomplish. The pros and cons of the various measures were discussed, especially emergency services implications. Workshops were held for Hastings Drive to get a better understanding of what is involved in the actual application of traffic calming measures. The Task Force identified and reviewed traffic problem areas throughout Belmont in order to understand what this program will eventually be called on to solve. Finally the objectives of the program and the process to determine which measures to implement were discussed and decisions were made for determination of the Belmont Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program.

Implementing the Program

The first candidate streets have already been determined according to direction given by the City Council. This takes the place of the initial petition according to the process described in this program. Engineering studies for these streets were performed by staff. Drawings of suggested measures have been prepared and discussed at the Task Force workshops. These streets are now ready to enter into the approval process pursuant to this program, as soon as the program is adopted by the City Council.

The public participation and approval element of the process is the next critical step. When, and if, the plans are approved by the appropriate percentage of homeowners, trial installations will be constructed. After a trial period, additional public participation will determine if the trial improvements were successful and should be made permanent. The permanent measures will be installed as soon as sufficient funding can be secured.